

In Time magazine comment, Biden lauds UAW President Fain as one of 100 most influential people of the year

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21 April 2024

In the face of growing rank-and-file anger over an historic sellout contract which has led to thousands of layoffs, a full court press is underway by the Democratic Party, the pseudo-left and the corporate media to build up the image of United Auto Workers president Shawn Fain as the hero of the American working class.

In reality, Shawn Fain is a leading figure in the attempts by American capitalism and the Biden White House to enforce labor discipline on workers. A new corporatist alliance between the government, the bureaucracy and Wall Street has been organized, with one of its key purposes being to wage war.

In honor of his growing political function, Fain was named one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people of the year. This is the latest accolade which Fain has bagged from the corporate press; CNN Business earlier named him "labor leader of the year."

The accompanying statement promoting him in *Time* magazine was written by Joe Biden.

In his short essay, Biden begins by endorsing Fain's claim that, "In this union, the members are the highest authority. In this country, the people are the highest authority" and adds that he knows this because he was "the first president to walk the picket line."

In fact, Fain's coming to power was the result of an intervention by the US government to rebrand the UAW leadership, which had been seriously discredited by decades of massive betrayals and corruption.

The federal government used an election marred by huge irregularities—with turnout at a pathetic 9 percent and more ballots marked undeliverable than actually cast—to put Fain in the union presidency, with the backing of the pseudo-left "reform" faction Unite All Workers for Democracy (UAWD).

The vote suppression "cut out the membership," in the words of one federal judge. In particular, its function was to suppress any information about the campaign of rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker and socialist Will Lehman.

Biden then lies about the role of Fain, boosting this sellout as a great labor leader.

He writes, "Shawn represents the hard-won success that unions—from the Teamsters, to the SEIU, to writers and actors, dockworkers and health care workers, baristas, warehouse workers, and more—had in making 2023 the year of the union." This is a lie. Every single one of these struggles saw the eruption of enormous rank-and-file anger against the trade union apparatus, which in each case sought to isolate, wear down and ultimately betray the fight by workers.

Turning to the autoworkers, Biden touted the supposed "historic"

wage increases Fain negotiated in the 2023 national auto contract.

In reality the minimal pay raises did not even keep up with inflation let alone make up for past concessions. At the end of the nearly five-year contract workers will be further behind than ever. What is more, mass layoffs are underway, with thousands of workers at Ford, General Motors and Stellantis laid off since the beginning of the year.

Building up the bureaucracy to prepare for World War III

The fact that Biden issued such a statement testifies to the extraordinary seriousness with which the government takes the credibility of the pro-war, pro-corporate union bureaucracy. Biden is going to such lengths to lie for Fain because there is a symbiotic relationship between the union apparatus and the Biden administration.

On one hand, as they have for decades, the unions have loyally suppressed the class struggle and smothered the demands of workers for job security and real improvements in wages and conditions.

The UAW apparatus has lined up behind the war drive against Russia and China. Its support for war was shown by its endorsement of "Genocide Joe" at its political action conference in Washington DC this year, where Secret Service agents dragged Gaza protesters from the hall while Fain and other union officials looked on. From the podium, Biden gave a speech invoking the "Arsenal of Democracy"—the PR name for the war economy during World War II—declaring that today, as in the past, American workers had to build "aircraft carriers and tanks."

The critical role of the bureaucracy in preparing the "home front" by clamping down on working class opposition is shown by the rapid elevation of Fain to the highest political levels. He was an honored guest at Biden's State of the Union in March, where threats against Russia and China were the main theme.

Earlier this month, Fain attended a reception at the White House for the Japanese prime minister, where a military alliance against China was the top agenda item. He dined on prime rib alongside warmongers like Anthony Blinken and billionaires like JPMorgan Chase head Jamie Dimon.

This weekend, he gave a warmongering speech at the *Labor Notes* conference, much of which was devoted to anointing him personally as the supposed savior of the American working class.

Wearing a jacket with a silhouette of a bomber and the phrase “Arsenal of Democracy,” he called workers the “greatest army in the world.” Outside the conference police arrested and rough-handed pro-Palestine protestors while conference organizers attempted to bolt the doors (The WSWS will have more to say on this speech, and the conference itself, in the coming days).

In return, the Biden administration has helped the union apparatus bring in new dues-paying members, including agreeing to press automakers to bring the UAW into EV battery plants and supporting the UAW’s unionization drive in the South.

But the UAW is not the only union whose bureaucracy is being drawn into the new war effort. Last week Biden used a speech before United Steelworkers union officials in Pittsburgh to announce the tripling of tariffs on imported Chinese steel, the latest in a series of trade war measures aimed at fueling anti-Chinese sentiment.

The “Will Lehman factor”

These developments underscore the importance of the campaign of rank-and-file socialist autoworker Will Lehman during the UAW’s 2022 election campaign.

In the election Will Lehman was the only candidate who articulated the interests of the rank and file. He sought not to reform the UAW apparatus, but to abolish it. Fain and then-incumbent UAW President Ray Curry both represented that apparatus and by extension corporate management and the state. As Lehman declared during the UAW presidential debate,

What the UAW likes to do is wave the American flag and say ‘Only Made in USA,’ when that divides us. We need global unity to face multinational corporations, and it’s only going to come from workers organizing on the shop floor.

I’m a socialist, I’m working to advance a workers’ agenda ... They’re all capitalists. They are all going to work under what capitalism allows. Workers need workers’ organizations to carry out democratic control over the production of these facilities, in a manner that benefits human need, not private profit. In opposition to the madness of the capitalist system what we need is a planned economy, and we need worker control of that economy.

In response to a question from the moderator on how he would work with the UAW bureaucracy Lehman explained that his goal was to abolish the union apparatus and place power in the hands of the rank-and-file.

I don’t intend to use the same bureaucratic methods that have been used for decades. Others have tried that, and they will fail. It is not a matter of getting a spot in the bureaucracy ...

My turn is to workers on the factory floor, because that is where the power is ... We need to be clear that it is two distinct layers we are talking about.... I am not speaking to the

bureaucrats, I am speaking to the workers where ever they are, whatever industry, we need to reorganize this based on human need, not this system of private profit.

Fain and UAWD claimed this program only demonstrated how inexperienced and unserious, even “anti-union,” Lehman was. What they actually meant was that that he could not be allowed to interfere with an apparatus that is a critical prop of the capitalist state.

The idea that workers could vote for a socialist so terrified the UAW apparatus that they deliberately suppressed any information about the election, and in particular Will Lehman’s campaign, from the rank-and-file.

Despite the barrage of lies aimed at chloroforming the working class, Lehman won nearly 5,000 votes in 2022 despite the systematic voter suppression. Lehman’s appeal for a socialist and internationalist strategy to oppose war and austerity continues to win significant support from autoworkers.

Assessing the significance of the 2023 sellout contract and the critical role the UAW is playing in the US war drive, Lehman wrote in an opinion piece published in *Newsweek*,

The main concerns of White House and the UAW leadership have been to contain the autoworkers’ strikes within carefully defined limits and ensure the companies’ “competitiveness” as they transition to EVs.

Fain and Biden also fear that a growing strike movement will undercut Washington’s plans to massively escalate and fund its wars. During the strike, Biden, Fain, and Ford’s chairman all praised the transformation of auto plants to military production during World War II.

The integration of the UAW apparatus into the drive by the Biden administration and US imperialism as a whole for World War III shows that the fight against war is bound up with developing a rebellion against the corporatist trade union apparatus as a whole.



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